

SECTION B: PROGRAM DELIVERY AND STAFF QUALIFICATION NARRATIVES

Instructions: Section B responses must be in narrative form. Provide data/documentation of previous achievements where applicable. All responses must comply with stated page limits. Figures such as tables, charts and graphs can be included in the narrative, but such information will be counted toward page limits. Text and figures beyond the stated page limit will not be considered and should not be submitted with the application. All references must be cited.

Exemplar 1: Description of Comprehensive Improvement Services (25 points possible)

Describe how comprehensive improvement services that result in dramatic, documented and sustainable improvement in underperforming urban secondary schools will be delivered to LEA's that contract for your services. Comprehensive services include, but are not limited to the following:

Support systems to ensure student and teacher success and sustain improvement

Content and delivery systems and mechanisms proven to result in dramatic and sustained improvement linked to student achievement

Job embedded professional development at leadership, teacher and support levels to increase internal capacity for improvement and sustainability linked to student achievement

Comprehensive short cycle and summative assessment systems to measure performance and goal attainment linked to the building school improvement plan.

Exemplar 1 Narrative Limit: 4 pages (insert narrative here)

American Institutes for Research (AIR) is eager to be placed on the Michigan Department of Education's preferred provider list. This application describes how AIR will engage with the school districts as the external provider. Through successful engagement in a partnership with AIR, school districts and schools can expect to achieve the following outcomes:

Implementation of a coherent, disciplined support system to ensure student and teacher success and to sustain improvement

Improved climate and culture to increase internal capacity for improvement and sustainability linked to student achievement

Improved effectiveness of teachers and leaders through job-embedded professional development

Improved parent and community engagement

Higher expectations and results for all students, measured using comprehensive short cycle and summative assessment systems linked to building school improvement plans

Embedded in each outcome are strategies focused on building the capacity of the school and the school district to improve the critical elements essential for sustained improvement. Our turnaround and transformation framework is smart, real world, and hands on; it focuses on the six core elements discussed below.

Leadership That Drives Change

The actions of the school leadership, staff, and teachers determine the quality of students' school experiences and the effectiveness of the education they receive. AIR focuses on building the capacity of administrators and teachers, supporting them with high-quality tools and resources, improving working conditions, and building a climate and culture that lead to sustained improvement.

We offer school leadership coaching and mentoring, customized to the needs of each school. Our team of experts includes

former district and school administrators who have worked to improve large struggling urban districts and schools. We are flexible in our approach, although we typically blend face-to-face visits with e-mail and phone calls. To build collaborative networks for sharing and support, we also utilize professional learning communities across districts that have like areas of growth. For schools in a turnaround situation, our coaching typically focuses on the following key endeavors:

- Refining key data elements and monitoring the processes of both growth (student achievement, leading indicators) and implementation fidelity (how well the school/district is implementing the plan).

- Coordinating and aligning various implementation strategies and plans toward common goals.

- Establishing collection, review, and dissemination processes of monitoring data at the school, district, and community levels.

- Convening the district and school leadership teams (and other vendors as applicable) to review data and make changes to implementation plans.

In addition, we provide a turnaround leadership kickoff retreat that sets the foundation for district and school leaders to be prepared for the key activities, quick wins, and milestones that need to occur in the first 30, 60, 90, and 180 days of school. This retreat includes a focus on individual skill building through identifying leadership competencies as well as structural implementation of the transformation plan: setting the metrics, clarifying lines of authority, structuring the progress meetings, and implementing process improvements across key areas.

Comprehensive Diagnostics

A collection of diagnostic tools—both to create a well-aligned improvement plan at the beginning of the process and to monitor the effectiveness of each strategy throughout the process in order to modify or change course—is essential for effective and sustained improvement. AIR uses tools to monitor benchmarks and document the progress of the turnaround and transformation plans. Monitoring the leading and lagging indicators outlined in the School Improvement Grant (SIG), as well as regularly and systematically reviewing Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) school and classroom data, provide the basis for ensuring that the initiative stays on course.

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AIR's recently developed tool, the Implementation Continuum for School Improvement, Turnaround, and Transformation, is intended to guide schools undergoing improvement in identifying the current level of practice related to six key elements (leadership that drives change, comprehensive diagnostics, coherent instructional system, student-centered climate, educator effectiveness, and comprehensive community engagement). The Implementation Continuum for School Improvement, Turnaround, and Transformation is intended for use by school and district leaders. The current level of practice is identified as Level 1, 2, 3, or 4. The identification of current levels of practice can bring about the following:

- Inform initial planning and design of an improvement, turnaround, or transformation plan.

- Identify necessary midcourse corrections.

- Monitor and track progress toward full implementation.

Our model also suggests that schools establish early warning systems utilizing the Early Warning System (EWS) Tool v2.0 developed by the National High School Center at AIR in collaboration with Matrix Knowledge Group (www.betterhighschools.org/ews.asp). AIR would work with school teams to develop, implement, and utilize customized early warning systems. This tool enables schools, districts, and states to identify students who may be at risk of dropping out of high school and to monitor these students' responses to interventions. The intent of an early warning system is to use readily available data to systematically identify students with an increased risk of disengagement and high school dropout to get them back on track for graduation. The EWS tool allows middle and high school administrators and teachers to keep track of students in their first year of high school by entering data on absences, course failures, grade point averages, and credit attainment by semester. The tool can be programmed to automatically calculate indicators of risk ("flags"), using a set of thresholds or benchmarks for each research-based indicator. If at any point a student's performance falls below a given threshold, the student would be flagged as being at risk of dropping out. Identified students can then be matched with interventions to help them get on track for graduation. We see the design and implementation of early warning systems as an important part of the response to intervention at the middle and high school levels and transforming chronically low-performing schools.

Educator Effectiveness

The strongest leverage point in any system's change lies with the people who make up that system. At the same time, people's resistance to change is often a significant obstacle to implementation and sustaining change initiatives. For these reasons, the AIR model for school turnaround and transformation focuses heavily on building the collective capacity of school leaders and teachers to improve instruction and student learning. Through the

precise use of student data, frequent and highly embedded leadership and instructional coaching, and an emphasis on collaborative peer support and accountability, school leaders and teachers will be able to improve instruction and learning while positively affecting the school climate and working conditions.

Coherent Instructional Guidance System

AIR believes that a well-integrated system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is necessary for improving student achievement. For this reason, when asked to conduct curriculum audits for schools and districts, our approach is to evaluate the written, tested, **and** taught curriculum. To help us in this type of study, we have designed a researched-based framework that synthesizes the most current and rigorous research on the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Our turnaround/transformation model works to ensure not only the alignment of these critical supports to student learning but also their integration into teacher practice. Our staff is prepared to support school leaders and teachers with integration of the Common Core Standards and Michigan High School Content Expectations, as well as the transition from Michigan's Grade Level Content Expectations.

Family and Community Engagement

We know that effective family engagement is a cornerstone of a positive environment (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Our extensive work with schools in promoting successful family and community engagement has been to provide tools and strategies that help build support and create better modes of communication and buy-in to the vision of a successful school. In doing so, however, it is critical to determine where parents and the community feel a school needs to work on improvement. When the attitudes and awareness are understood, AIR can assist the school with determining appropriate strategies that help build a more positive relationship.

Student-Centered Climate

The typical conversation on a climate of high expectations centers on expectations of student achievement and engagement. Although this is critical to school success, the teacher and school leader are the two most influential aspects of student achievement. High expectations for teachers and quality enactment of school turnaround strategies are just the beginning steps of creating a climate and culture of high expectations. The AIR turnaround model requires a great deal of collaboration among teachers and school leadership. In the course of this collaboration, collective accountability for student success is emphasized through the public sharing of student achievement results on benchmark and formative assessments and through peer observations of classroom instructional practices.

Our Approach

In our approach, we work with the local education agency to improve a school's performance in each of the following critical mechanisms over the course of three years:

A core **school leadership team** is established immediately, and the team is coached and trained to sustain the interventions.

A research-based **diagnostic needs assessment** serves as the foundation to engage staff and tailor the interventions, with tools that can be used for ongoing progress monitoring.

An **instructional framework** engages teachers in a daily review of student data and weekly collaboration with other teachers on instruction through **professional learning communities (PLCs)**.

A three-tiered **parent and community engagement approach** includes a school partnership council, a family support coordinator, and targeted training for parents.

An overlay of **tools and expert coaching** in the areas of teacher and leader evaluation, curriculum alignment and development, management, operations, governance, and resource allocation ensures that a school can successfully operate in the context of the school district and the state.

To establish these mechanisms, our work includes the following:

Biweekly facilitated school leadership team meetings focused on implementing the turnaround and transformation plan and developing instructional leadership capacity provided by the AIR turnaround leadership team

Job-embedded training and instructional coaching for the school turnaround coordinator and PLC leaders

Consulting support in content and technical areas, specifically matching the needs of the school and the school district

One of the biggest challenges for district and school leaders is having in place a systemic process to regularly assess school progress. Our process paves the way for establishing measures and regularly tracking progress. One of the efforts would be the midyear "reality check," a facilitated process of reflecting on the school improvement plan goals and objectives as they relate to relevant, up-to-date school data. The intent is to (1) have an honest conversation about current practice; (2) identify obstacles to implementation; (3) gauge effectiveness and examine emerging results, to the extent possible; and (4) then, plan actionable steps for leaders to take in the next 30 days to deepen the implementation of new practices. The reality check is also an opportunity for AIR staff to model monitoring processes and behaviors. The event may be the first

opportunity that participants have been given to practice monitoring. It is very likely that this type of monitoring represents a paradigm shift for all involved. As such, AIR facilitators will be prepared to act as both facilitators of the process and leadership coaches who help participants understand the role of ongoing monitoring beyond the life of the school improvement process as well as the skills, practices, and structures needed to support such monitoring throughout the school improvement experience.

As a comprehensive lead partner for school turnaround, we focus on building the capacity and efficacy of educators. Our primary focus is to improve systems for all learners. We know that in order for improvements to be sustained at the school level, district systems and structures must be in place. All of our products and services have as their primary goals building clients' individual and collective efficacy and establishing and maintaining sustainable programs and systems (see Table 1). We design our services to clients so that we release responsibility to the client over time. We embed modeling and coaching in all that we do. We treat each client as an individual and modify our approach to meet the client's needs, focusing on the most pressing needs first. Given the limited funding that SIG provides, we recognize the importance of setting the foundation for the districts so that they can build and grow with the future. We focus not only on the people but also on the tools and processes that will outlive the current staff. We aim to make routine the practices of clear authority and accountability, transparent goals, and open communication.

Table 1. Documented Results of Sustainable Improvement

Project	District	Evidence of Student Achievement Gains
Romulus Middle School Transformation (2010–Present)	Romulus, Michigan	(1) District benchmark assessment data indicated increased percentages (from 11 percent to 22 percent) of students in Grades 6–8 meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and mathematics. (2) Office referrals are down significantly from last year, as are out-of-school suspensions.
Hazelwood East Middle School Turnaround (2010–Present)	Hazelwood, Missouri	(1) For our first year of work, district benchmark assessment data indicated a 22 percent average increase in the number of Grade 6 students meeting or exceeding state standards in mathematics. (2) After starting the year as the lowest performing middle school in the district, Hazelwood East Middle ended the year outperforming the other five middle schools in the district as determined by district benchmark assessments. (3) For the second year, Scholastic Reading Inventory results indicated that there was significant improvement in reading lexile levels, from 47 percent of students reading on grade level in August 2011 to 67 percent of students reading on grade level in May 2012.
Eisenhower High School Turnaround (2011–Present)	Decatur, Illinois	(1) The percentage of students who are proficient on classroom formative assessments in English/language arts (ELA) increased from 29 percent to 74 percent. (2) Coaching and observation data showed rigor and relevance in classroom instruction increased by 30 percent.
School Transformation (June 2007)	Gary School District, Gary, Indiana	Kuny Elementary had not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five consecutive years. We conducted a school review and provided intensive technical assistance during a yearlong intervention that resulted in the school making AYP for two consecutive years. A significant and notable change reported by school teams was an improved culture and collaboration among teachers.
District Improvement (2003–2006)	U.S. Virgin Islands (33 schools)	After three years, 19 of 33 schools had significant gains in student achievement on the 2005 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (approximately 6 or more percentage points) □ All K–12 schools instituted improvement planning processes and completed plans each year. □ Teacher leaders were identified and trained in each building around SIG planning, ELA, and mathematics content coaching, resulting in improved instruction and achievement.

Exemplar 2: Use of Scientific Educational Research (15 points possible)

Describe how scientific educational research and evidence based practices will be used as the basis for all content and delivery systems and services provided to the LEA.

The applicant should provide detailed data that supports successful performance in utilizing research and evidence-based practices in the delivery of systems and services, especially as applied to secondary school settings.

Cite and reference available research studies (as appropriate) and **provide data** that indicate the practices used have a positive impact on the academic achievement of students in the subjects and grade levels in which you intend to provide services.

Exemplar 2 Narrative Limit: 3 pages (insert narrative here)

Although turnaround scholarship is emergent and not yet conclusive (Murphy & Meyers, 2008), efforts in the last decade to improve or turn around low-performing schools indicate that turnaround can be achieved but is not guaranteed (Hassel & Steiner, 2003). No one strategy seems to be a “magic bullet” for turning around school performance. Chronically low-performing schools appear to require “unique and multiple strategies to address the context and complexity of the school and its community” (Housman & Martinez, 2001, p. 7). One aspect of turnaround that seems to be fundamentally different from most other current and past school improvement efforts is its comprehensiveness (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Case study research suggests that all of the following should be infused in any legitimate school turnaround effort: comprehensively diagnosing the school situation, developing or hiring a school leader who drives turnaround change, increasing teacher capacity for effective instruction, tying teaching and learning to a coherent instructional system, establishing a student-centered climate, and engaging the community.

Leadership That Drives Change

Leithwood and Strauss (2009) contend that turnaround leadership practices are not necessarily divergent from typically strong leadership strategies such as direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. Herman et al. (2008), however, suggest that school leadership is a “key part of school change turnaround” (p. 10) and that principals of turnaround schools must effectively communicate the need for dramatic changes and demonstrate a clear commitment to those changes by following through on them with urgency. According to the authors, the research base suggests that school leaders can signal change through a series of actions, including communicating a clear purpose to school staff, creating high expectations and values, sharing leadership and authority, building a consensus that permeates the entire staff, and eliminating any distractions to ensure that the maximum amount of classroom time is focused on instruction. Similarly, Hassel and Hassel (2009) suggest that turnaround leaders demonstrate change by focusing on a few early wins, breaking organizational norms, pushing rapid-fire experimentation, getting the right staff and righting the remainder, driving decisions with open-air data, and leading a turnaround campaign.

Comprehensive Diagnostics

Few low-performing schools pursue dramatic change on their own while remaining hopeful that less drastic improvement efforts will be successful in avoiding state or federal consequences (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007). Turnaround research, however, indicates that such schools should consistently assess themselves. “Selfanalysis enables failing schools to monitor successes as well as focus on areas that continue to lag” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 322). In this context, organizational self-analysis is not limited to any one individual but a consistent review of the situation by all (Herman et al., 2008). In his review of factors associated with successful school turnaround in England, Ansell (2004) noted the importance of developing capacity to (1) conduct a thorough internal review to identify key weaknesses and devise corrective strategies; and (2) monitor plan implementation, including regular progress reviews.

Educator Effectiveness

In his short review of the literature on teachers in urban districts, Jacob (2007) comprehensively reports that teachers in chronically low-performing urban schools “are more likely to be inexperienced, less likely to be certified, and less likely to have graduated from competitive colleges than are suburban teachers” (p. 135). Practical concerns about initiatives such as reconstitution, however, sometimes restrict what district and school leadership can do regarding infusing new teacher talent. Limited accessibility to high-quality teachers as well as an unattractive school product make effective teacher training imperative for success. Herman et al. (2008) point out that chronically low-performing schools must draw on analysis results of student achievement data and curriculum review “to determine specific areas of weakness in instruction, establish priority areas for instructional focus, and make changes in those areas to strengthen teaching and improve student learning” (p. 18). Furthermore, turnaround schools described in various case studies “relentlessly focused on improving teachers’ skills and shoring up gaps in their content knowledge and instructional skills” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 16). In 13 of the 15 schools in a study by Duke et al. (2005), “resources were used to provide staff members with additional training linked to the specific needs of students” (p. 18).

Coherent Instructional Guidance System

Ideally, “school accountability systems align system goals with school organizational goals and create coherence between incentives and instructional programs” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 277). Low-performing schools seem to be less likely to maintain curricular alignment. “Conducting a comprehensive curriculum review can ensure that the curriculum aligns with state and local standards and meets the needs of all students” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 19).

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Curriculum alignment or change, especially in line with standardized testing, is another turnaround strategy undertaken in some schools (Brady, 2003), sometimes “focused exclusively on reading, writing, and mathematics” (p. 17).

Related, multiple studies have highlighted the importance of teachers focusing their instruction through self-directed analysis of student assessment and classroom data. Through formative or diagnostic practices, teachers can monitor teaching and learning and target areas where student knowledge gaps exist or remain by reteaching and/or adjusting instructional strategies for individual or groups of students (Duke et al., 2005; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002). For example, in a forum summary provided by the Center on Education Policy (Scott, 2010), “all case study schools that exited restructuring used data frequently to make decisions about instruction and regroup students by skill level” (p. 1).

Family and Community Engagement

In Duke et al.’s (2005) case studies, three primary points of contact between school and community emerged. First, school-home communications improved in 14 of the study’s 15 turnaround schools. In general, schools did a better job of keeping parents informed and addressing parent concerns. Second, 13 of the 15 schools initiated at least one program to increase parent involvement, including opportunities to assist in class or improve skills for helping students learn at home. Lastly, 10 of the 15 schools established at least one community-based partnership, including community agencies, local businesses, universities or colleges, and churches. “Partners provided turnaround schools with mentors, in-class volunteers, equipment, funds for purchasing needed supplies, and moral support” (Duke et al., 2005, p. 22).

“Since many of the students in failing schools face disruptive factors to learning outside of school, turnaround initiatives should engage parents on some level” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 322). Increasing partnerships and fostering communication with parents and teachers would be first steps to developing social and human capital for schools. For example, parent involvement in a troubled Atlanta elementary school increased rapidly after the school initiated a parent program to increase adult knowledge and skills, enabling parents to assist their children with homework (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Similarly, according to Rhim et al. (2007), turnaround Chicago schools engaged the local community by initiating partnerships with grassroots organizations that helped parents understand the importance of school reform. In addition, the city also “convened groups of community members at each school who guided changes that best responded to the needs of the community at each site” (p. 12).

Student-Centered Climate

The impoverished communities in which youngsters at low-performing schools often live can make it difficult for students to arrive at school ready to learn (Corallo & McDonald, 2001). Student absenteeism and mobility (Malen & Rice, 2004) also present challenges, including disruptions in preparation and learning not only for moving students but for teachers and stable students as well (Jacob, 2007). Increasing opportunities for students to share their perspectives can lead to school structures more conducive to student learning (Mitra, 2003; Mitra, 2004; Smyth, 2007). Recent research suggests that the utilization of student voice to inform school policy could play a part in increased learning and lowering dropout rates (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004). Information learned from student experiences in school can provide teachers and administrators with valuable information to help design curriculum and drive school policy (Kushman, 1997).

Conclusion

School turnaround requires rapid improvement in schools as demonstrated by increased student achievement in two or three years (Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2009). A number of responses to chronic low performance have been attempted over the last decade or more, including school improvement planning, expert assistance, provision of choice, increased educational time, whole-school reform, reconstitution, and closure (Murphy & Meyers, 2008), but many of these efforts have been incremental (Brady, 2003) and few have been found as a coherent strategy (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Schools that have explored the variety of such strategies have not had rapid, clear success, and “they now need to look beyond slow, incremental change and examine practices that will raise and sustain student achievement within one to three years” (Herman et al., 2008, p. 7). Case study research indicates that the incorporation and synchronization of each of the dimensions of education discussed above are necessary components of achieving school turnaround.

Exemplar 3: Job Embedded Professional Development **(15 points possible)**

Describe how a job-embedded professional development plan will be put in place to support principals, school leadership teams, teachers, and support staff.

- The applicant should provide detailed data that supports successful performance in developing job-embedded professional development plans for:

- o principals
- o school leadership teams
- o teachers
- o support staff

Exemplar 3 Narrative Limit: 2 pages (insert narrative here).

Just as a single leader cannot provide the force and energy needed for school turnaround and transformation, neither can the work of single classrooms or single teachers change the direction of an entire school. School turnaround and transformation requires the collective improvement of all teachers and classrooms to significantly improve student achievement (Herman et al., 2008). While simultaneously working to improve the practice of individual teachers and classrooms, AIR proposes a strategy focused on building the collective capacity of teams of teachers and groups of classrooms through providing “at-elbow,” job-embedded support for instructional improvement as well as frequent and regular collaborative review of student progress and instructional planning.

The use of an AIR turnaround consultant with primary responsibilities for coaching leaders, supporting team meetings, and participating on the school leadership team (more on this below) will help to ensure that teachers have the support needed to implement the intervention model. By working to remove the isolation of the classroom and supplying teachers with collaborative assistance on student performance, the turnaround consultant will provide an additional level of instructional leadership for the school. The support of the AIR senior turnaround consultant will be augmented by content-area technical assistance visits that best match the need of the school—be it mathematics curriculum, students with disabilities, data systems, and more. Under the guidance of the turnaround consultant and the school leaders, teams of teachers will meet multiple times a week (daily if the school context requires) to accomplish a structured set of objectives, as follows:

Review of formative assessment data on key learning targets (Herman et al., 2008)

Planning for classroom instructional interventions based on summative and formative assessment data as well as peer observations of student learning (Herman et al., 2008)

Discussion and support planning for specific student needs in such areas as social-emotional well-being, language proficiency, and learning exceptionality

Identification and implementation of key family and community communication and support actions

Through collaboratively reviewing formative and summative assessment data, planning for instruction, working to meet the social and emotional needs of students, and coordinating communication with families and the larger school community, teachers will be engaged in a process of building collective capacity in each of these areas. In turn, peer accountability and support will provide the drivers for the transformation of the school culture and the development of a critical mass of energy focused on student learning.

Through daily e-mail and weekly phone collaboration, AIR’s senior turnaround consultant will support the school. The assigned AIR staff members are experienced school leaders with the skills and dispositions needed for leading dramatic change. The senior turnaround consultant will visit the school frequently to provide additional support, coaching, and supervision. While at the school site, AIR’s senior turnaround consultant will work with the members of the school leadership team to develop their capacity as turnaround leaders, monitor the implementation of instructional improvements, and build systems that will lead to long-term sustainability of the turnaround initiatives.

Principal and School Leadership Team

Although the principal is possibly the most significant influence on all aspects of the turnaround and transformation process, again a single person cannot effectively create the kind of change required in consistently underperforming schools (Fullan, 2006; Herman et al., 2008). The identification and development of a highly effective school leadership team is required to implement, monitor, and sustain turnaround strategies with both intensity and focus on student learning. The establishment of a school leadership team composed of roles such as principal, assistant principal, instructional coaches, family and social services, teacher leaders, and other specialized roles will be a key initial step. The coaching and development of this team will constitute a significant focus for turnaround implementation support.

AIR will provide professional development, modeling, and coaching for the school leadership team. We also will assist the school principal in effective team building, action planning, standards-based instruction, using data to drive rigorous student instruction, building a PLC, and working with parents and the community to create shared responsibility for school and student success. These professional development sessions will be designed to meet the needs of the participating schools and principals. In addition, designated coaches from AIR, additional external providers, and partners will provide coaching and tools on other aspects of the turnaround as needed.

Instructional Coaching

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As any classroom teacher can attest, teaching is often a solitary and isolating profession. Traditionally, professional development for teachers has been limited to training sessions, with little support for actual implementation and almost no feedback on practice. AIR's focus on classroom-based instructional coaching seeks to provide the most job-embedded form of professional development possible by placing the support directly in the classroom, with teachers' actual students, and focused on their specific curriculum and instructional needs.

AIR uses an instructional-coaching cycle that outlines the process for improving instructional practice and student learning. This cycle is guided by the Individual Professional Development Plans created by teachers and by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, specifically Domains 2 and 3 (Classroom Environment and Instruction) (Danielson, 2007). AIR instructional-coaching and content-area experts will train and coach school staff on the instructional-coaching cycle, observations, collaboration techniques, providing feedback, and using data and professional teaching standards such as the Danielson Framework to improve instructional practices in the classroom.

To support the instructional coaching work, AIR has developed the online Coaching Tracking Tool. The tool helps districts, schools, and coaches consistently collect data, and manage and organize their school-level coaching program. Coaches complete coaching reports that collect in-depth information about how the coaches are spending time (i.e., one-on-one coaching, lesson planning, demo lessons, etc.) and organizing improvement efforts with teachers and groups of teachers. The Danielson Framework is loaded directly into the tool in order to allow the coach and the teacher to make direct connections to expectations for professional practice. After coaches enter information on their coaching activities through the online tool, school and district leaders can analyze results through two types of data summaries. The School Coaching Summary reports information about how coaching time is being spent in the school, and the Teacher Activity Summary reports information on the coaching that a particular teacher or group of teachers has been receiving. These data can directly inform a teacher's Individual Professional Development Plan and data discussions by the principal and school leadership team. AIR provides distance training on the tool's use and how it fits into the process or model that already may be in place.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are the foundation of our instructional supports. Initially, the PLCs will be supported by AIR facilitators. As the year unfolds, school leaders and staff will assume responsibility for leading and facilitating PLCs to ensure sustainability. Training for the effective facilitation of PLCs is coupled with targeted professional development in the necessary content (e.g., mathematics and literacy) and instructional strategies. In turn, implementation for the content and instructional practices is supported through PLCs. Teachers will meet regularly to review student data, develop and use formative assessments, and practice the instructional strategies they are learning through targeted professional development. In instances where multiple school sites choose to do so, the PLC leader network meetings will be held monthly to assess progress and facilitate effective meetings. In addition, AIR staff and/or consultants will provide content-area coaching as needed for specific teachers.

Teachers also will be engaged in collaborative coaching and professional development focused on providing instructional feedback. One of the biggest obstacles to instructional change and improvement is the isolation of the classroom and lack of timely and constructive feedback to teachers on their practice. In conjunction with classroom observations and feedback provided by the school turnaround coordinator, teachers will frequently observe their colleagues' classrooms and follow a structured observation protocol in which student learning is the central focus. These observations, whether provided by the turnaround coordinator or by teacher peers, will be coordinated with the formative assessment and key learning targets arising from the daily team meetings. As peer observations, these observations are nonevaluative of teacher performance, focused on gathering information on student learning, and intended to support ongoing instructional planning. When combined with the frequent collaborative data review and planning sessions, peer observations serve to build the collective capacity and shared accountability across a team of teachers, thereby positively affecting a larger number of students than through coaching and support strategies focused on individual teachers.

Exemplar 4: Experience with State and Federal Requirements (15 points possible)

Describe your experience with State and Federal Requirements, especially as it relates to the following:

Aligning model(s) to be implemented with the School Improvement Framework

The Michigan Comprehensive Needs Assessment

- Individual School/District Improvement Plans, North Central Association (NCA)
 - o Response demonstrates alignment of the above mentioned elements, AKA “One Common Voice -One Plan.”
- Understanding of Title 1 (differences between Targeted Assistance and School-wide)
 - State assessments — Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the Michigan Merit Exam (MME)
 - Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs)
 - Michigan High School Content Expectations (HSCEs)
 - Michigan Merit Curriculum
 - Michigan Curriculum Framework
 - Section 504 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Exemplar 4 Narrative Limit: 2 pages (insert narrative here)

Our experience is built on more than two decades of efforts to improve outcomes for students, and we draw on the expertise of approximately 200 staff to work in the areas of teacher and leader quality, district and school improvement, curriculum and instruction, data analytics, and family engagement. This work has been at all educational levels—federal, state, and local. We have been at the forefront of improvement efforts over the years— conducting research and developing tools and strategies that help educators develop and sustain practices that contribute to improved student achievement.

Federal SIG Requirements

Our framework provides research-and evidenced-based systems and structures, and a theory of change that meets School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding requirements, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), by focusing on improving leadership capacity to promote and support improved teaching practice and student learning outcomes. We are currently working and implementing this SIG-aligned framework with several SIG districts and schools. In addition, AIR has assisted schools and districts with completing needs assessments and SIG applications in Illinois and Missouri.

AIR understands the importance of working with the “right” external partner, and has developed the *Guide to Working With External Providers*, which offers a step-by-step approach for school leaders to research and select a high-quality service provider. The guide is based on existing research and field experience related to how schools and districts can work most effectively with external providers. Researchers reviewed the academic literature on school-provider partnerships and interviewed leading experts on the subject as well as a wide-ranging group of practitioners. The guide, aligned with SIG requirements, details how to establish an effective partnership agreement and how to evaluate the success of the partnership.

In addition, the AIR instructional coaching activities address the SIG funding regulations, including for providing job-embedded, ongoing support for high-quality instruction by developing the skills of coaches, principals, and other school leaders to effectively engage teachers in continuous instructional improvement. We are delivering our solution to our current SIG schools to build the capacity of instructional coaches, school leaders (i.e., principals and instructional leadership teams), and teachers by engaging each stakeholder in learning opportunities with follow-up support and feedback.

Curriculum, Standards, and Assessment

The activities that drive our standards-based instructional guidance system work rely on our experience with and knowledge of the **Common Core State Standards, Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations, Michigan High School Content Expectations, and Michigan Merit Curriculum**. A variety of projects have provided AIR expertise, including supporting the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum in Michigan, collaboration with the Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE’s) Curriculum and Instruction unit, and partnering with the Superintendent’s Dropout Challenge.

AIR works closely with MDE’s Curriculum and Instruction unit that developed the High School Content Expectations. Currently, AIR is collaborating with MDE’s Curriculum and Instruction unit to complete the development of the *High School Roadmap to Success* website that is aligned to the National High School Center’s Eight Elements of High School Improvement. This site will provide educators across the state with a tool to assist them with a research-based guide that will pave the way for developing plans to prepare all students to master the High School Content Expectations. AIR worked with MDE to align the Eight Elements of High School Improvement to Michigan’s School Improvement Framework. AIR collaborates with MDE’s Dropout Challenge team to provide resources for the *Graduation Town* website (www.graduationtown.org), which makes research-based information available to educators across the state to

assist schools in their efforts to prepare all students for college and careers. AIR staff are equipped and ready to support the efforts of developing content and delivery systems and mechanisms proven to result in dramatic and sustained improvement linked to student achievement.

Data Use and Monitoring

Data coaches work with teachers to bring data to life—to make it relevant and applicable to teaching and learning. Our data coaches focus their professional development on assisting teachers and teacher teams with gathering the “right” data to form hypotheses, support reflections, and build a foundation for continuous improvement. AIR staff has expertise with assessments, including the **Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)**, the **Michigan Merit Exam (MME)**, and the **Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)**. This expertise will assist school leaders in developing comprehensive short cycle and summative assessment systems to measure performance and goal attainment linked to the school improvement plan.

School Improvement Planning and Implementation

AIR will provide expert coaching to guide the school principal and leadership team on aligning various implementation strategies and plans toward common goals. AIR staff members have participated in several full-day meetings with MDE to develop cross-walks between the **School Improvement Framework** and various school improvement models and documents. Per MDE’s request, AIR has conducted research and literature reviews to ensure that the **School Improvement Framework** is aligned to current research. AIR has partnered with MDE to develop and align the **School Improvement Review Visit** process to the School Improvement Framework. AIR staff members have worked in Michigan schools and participated at the school level in the development of **Michigan School Improvement Plans**. In addition, our staff members have worked in Michigan North Central Association of College and Schools (NCA) schools and have co-developed **NCA Improvement Plans**. AIR’s staff understands the **Michigan School Improvement Framework** and has been an instrumental partner in the One Common Voice, One Plan; we can use that expertise to help schools developing support systems to ensure student and teacher success and to sustain improvement.

Based in our offices across the country, our staff and consultants together have an average of 20 years of experience serving states, schools, and districts in rural, suburban, and urban communities. The work reaches from the classroom to the state department to the U.S. Department of Education and creates a strong foundation on which our model and approach rely. AIR experts in content and state requirements are available for consultation, training, or on-the-ground technical assistance. Our clients receive the support and expertise of leading educational experts, including district leaders, curriculum directors, turnaround principals, principal coaches, instructional coaches, teachers, and professional developers.

Exemplar 5: Sustainability Plan **(15 points possible)**

Describe how a sustainability plan will be put in place for the building to become self-sufficient at the end of the 3-year grant period.

- The applicant should demonstrate significant knowledge and experience in developing sustainability plans.

Exemplar 5 Narrative Limit: 2 pages (insert narrative here)

Prior to current turnaround efforts, numerous schools undertook comprehensive efforts to reform the organization and improve student outcomes. Studies of successful reform and improvement models point to the significance of the sound implementation of new practices and programs. Implementation is a process, not an event. Research suggests that full implementation can take several years. Our proposed solution spans three school years (three cycles, each starting in summer and concluding at the end of the school year). However, we recognize that achieving higher levels of implementation that lead to sustained improvement may require additional support. Our ultimate aim is to assist in building the capacity of a school’s leaders and institutionalizing practices that will outlive our direct support. One way we do this is by focusing on the implementation of strategies defined in school and district improvement plans, including MPS School Improvement Plans, the Comprehensive Literacy Plan, Comprehensive Mathematics and Science Plan, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and response to intervention.

This aspect of implementation is important to consider throughout each stage to ensure the long-term survival of the program or the practices. A myriad of potential changes in staff, leadership, and funding streams or shifting priorities and politics can derail implementation efforts. School leaders, staff, and stakeholders will want to maintain an awareness of potential changes and their subsequent impact on implementation and sustainability.

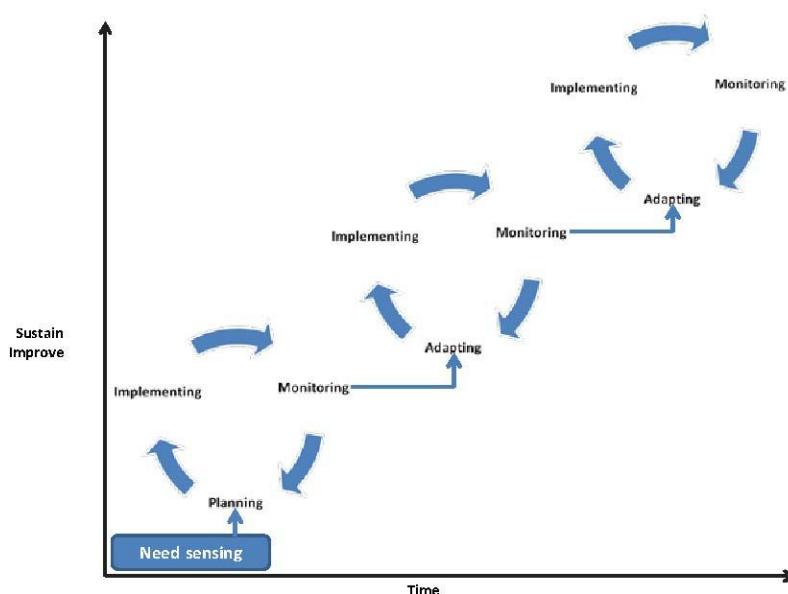
Emerging research on school turnaround efforts suggests that schools succeeding in achieving dramatic improvement of

student outcomes are more effective at integrating a concise set of initiatives as opposed to non-improving schools that struggle to find cohesion among a great (often overwhelming) number of improvement initiatives. Research also points to the need for alignment among district and school improvement priorities (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). We believe that initiative overload dilutes focus and energy, so we support a phased approach to implementing new initiatives. We promote depth of implementation over breadth of scope for turnaround schools, focusing first on establishing foundational practices for improving student outcomes. Our proposed solution engages turnaround leaders in assessing the scope and the alignment of school improvement plans and developing a counseled, thoughtful approach to implementation.

Theory of Action

Beginning with a needs-sensing process focused on assessing a school's strengths in organizational effectiveness, instruction, and leadership, the theory of action for the AIR turnaround and transformation model follows a process of continuous, sustainable improvement over time, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theory of Action



Planning. During the planning phase, school leadership teams and AIR consultants will identify key initiatives and progress-monitoring indicators. These indicators will be used to monitor implementation and guide the direction throughout the turnaround and transformation process.

Implementing. The implementation phase includes training for teachers and school leadership teams; the institution of the school leadership team with processes and structures for teacher collaboration, assessment, and curriculum support; and the additional supports for family and community engagement. Although represented as a distinct phase, implementation of the model and planning are in conjunction with progress monitoring by the school leadership team and consultants from AIR.

Monitoring. AIR has deep knowledge and expertise in program evaluation processes and educational research. This expertise will inform the development of a performance management plan with specific indicators of student success, improvements in school climate, and teacher effectiveness. Regular and frequent timelines for the monitoring of these indicators by teachers, school leaders, and AIR consultants will be outlined and included in progress-monitoring updates to the state of Michigan.

Adapting. Through disciplined and precise progress monitoring of implementation, strategic and effective adjustments to turnaround and transformation initiatives can be made to meet the needs of students, teachers, leaders, and the context of the school setting. Sustained improvement over time, however, requires course adjustments to maintain a focus on improvement to student achievement. Dramatic improvement of student learning requires swift, rapid-fire experimentation and decisive action (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). The process of monitoring progress and responding to results will be a frequent focus of the school leadership team and AIR.

Accountability, responsibility, and monitoring are critical components of ensuring that reform efforts move forward. They are also mechanisms for identifying barriers and challenges in order to meet them head on or make necessary course adjustments. Measurable indicators for success are defined, benchmarks are delineated, and data are collected and used to routinely gauge progress. AIR will assist the members of the school leadership team in building their knowledge about and capacity to use data for driving decisions and monitoring their work. As lead partner, we will work with the school

leadership team to hold periodic monitoring meetings at least every quarter. A SIG committee of a large stakeholder group—to include the principal, assistant principal, teacher leaders, district representation, union representatives, parents, and other community members—will be encouraged to meet at least every quarter to review and evaluate progress on each SIG goal, action step, and measurable outcome to provide expert recommendations on adjustments per their role.

Exemplar 6: Staff Qualifications **(15 points possible)**

Provide names and a brief summary of qualifications for the primary staff who will be involved in providing services to LEA's. Provide criteria for selection of additional staff that are projected to be working with LEA's. Include vitae of primary staff.

- Staff qualifications and vitae should match with areas that the applicant wishes to serve. Staff should have extensive experience in implementation of all applicable areas.

Exemplar 6 Narrative Limit: 1 page plus vitae for personnel (insert narrative and vitae here)

AIR is a national leader in teaching and learning improvement, providing the research, assessment, evaluation, and technical assistance to ensure that all students—particularly those facing historical disadvantages—have access to a high-quality, effective education. Staff members have the capacity to design and conduct rigorous and relevant education research and evaluations; develop and deliver tools, services, and resources targeted to schools, school districts, and communities; and analyze and synthesize education policy trends and practices. AIR's education mission is to help practitioners and policymakers at all levels improve teaching and learning, with a special emphasis on the disadvantaged. This mission is a focus when hiring our expert and experienced staff; as such, most are well equipped to work with students, staff, and other stakeholders in **high-poverty, high-minority secondary schools**.

Our expertise includes district and school improvement, educator effectiveness, expanded learning, special education, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) but extends beyond K–12 education. We also have deep knowledge of early childhood development, college and career readiness, higher education, organizational effectiveness, school finance policy, and workforce development. Our Education, Human Development, and the Workforce division's adult learning work focuses on the needs of English learners, adults seeking to enhance their literacy skills, and adult students who attend community colleges and alternative learning environments. The following brief staff bios demonstrate our expertise in delivering high-quality services that specifically address a school and district's readiness to learn, teach, and act.

Dawn Dolby, Senior Turnaround Consultant

Dolby has nearly 25 years of educational experience as a teacher, professional development trainer, and school improvement specialist. She has provided technical assistance to states and districts in need of improvement; worked with district teams to improve their educator talent through mentoring and induction practices; facilitated data interpretation sessions with teachers and leaders; and designed professional development in a variety of areas, including curriculum, examining student work, and technology integration. Dolby has worked with schools and districts in more than 25 states and has successfully supported numerous schools in comprehensive reform efforts leading to improved student achievement and improvement status.

Carla Hulce, Senior Turnaround Consultant, Special Education Expert

Hulce contributes her expertise designing specialized learning environments to improve the academic achievement of gifted students and students with learning disabilities to AIR's district and school improvement work. She has several years of experience working on school improvement initiatives in Chicago, including the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative and the Small Schools Workshop.

Rob Mayo, Ph.D., Senior Turnaround Consultant, Culture and Climate Expert

Dr. Mayo is experienced in designing the systems that increase the site-level accountability of school leaders, encourage learning-centered family involvement, improve the delivery of support services to students, and allow school and district leaders to better understand their data and improve their decision making. As a performance officer with the D.C. Public Charter School Board, Dr. Mayo was responsible for performance management; regulatory compliance

monitoring; and charter renewal, closure, and initial authorization processes.

Traci Karageorge, Technical Assistance Consultant

Karageorge focuses on school and district improvement work with an emphasis on secondary schools. She facilitates group processes in schools and districts to analyze data and secure consensus for improvement initiatives. She serves as a team lead and qualitative data collector for curriculum audit work in New York City. Karageorge is a trainer for the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum and a certified affiliate trainer for the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)[™].

Jill Shively, Technical Assistance Consultant

Shively develops tools, guides, and dissemination systems for educators on areas of turnaround and school improvement, including data use, school climate, and curriculum alignment. She has developed and produced the instructional Coaching Tracking Tool, Data Exploration video, and materials and training that support the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum. In addition, Shively has been tapped as project manager for the continuous development and improvement of AIR's School Turnaround products and services.

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